

Acute Lower Back Pain

The majority of us will experience an acute episode of lower back pain in our lifetimes. The vast majority of these cases will resolve within a few weeks with the correct management and exercises.

There can be various triggers for the pain, some known, some unknown. Perhaps you recently took a long car journey, or re-arrange the lounge or kitchen. Maybe you decided you wanted to get fit again and hit the gym like you did 10 years ago. Sometimes the pain can come on for no apparent reason.

Your lumbar spine is made up of 5 strong vertebrae, separated with soft discs that sit between each space. The discs allow shock absorption for the spine, while the vertebrae give movement via the facet joints, and structure for the soft tissues surrounding your back to attach to.

Acute back pain is commonly caused by one of these 3 structures: irritation of the facet joints, inflammation of the disc, or tension and fatigue in the muscles. How you manage this is key to your speedy recovery.



In severe acute cases, you may need to rest for the first 24 hours. However the inflammation means you will be more prone to stiffness, and staying still will only make you stiffer.

So find yourself lying for short periods, sitting for short periods, and walking for short periods. Be a fidget and move every 20 minutes!

Your posture is key. Our spines have natural curves which allow optimal loading through the spine. If you slump, you will spread the load unevenly, therefore further irritating your back. It is often better to sit on an upright chair, rather than a low, soft sofa.

Placing a rolled towel in the small of your back can help to facilitate this good sitting posture. If tight, tired muscles are an issue, use some heat such as a hot water bottle to ease the tension. Your practitioner may also suggest taking some anti-inflammatories or painkillers to help you through this initial period. This can help to prevent you developing abnormal postures, which may hinder your recovery. Check with your doctor first, if you are unsure which medications you can take.



Once the initial pain starts to ease a little, you need to increase your movement with stretches. These will be given to you by your practitioner and are often best done little and often throughout the day to avoid provoking your pain too much.